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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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HOOD AND KEATS

Keats's influence is to be found particularly in the poems published in 1827 under the title *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies,* etc. In the *Ode to the Moon* not only the image of the urn [ll. 65–68] recalls Keats's famous poem, but the mythologic representation of the moon,

> Sometimes I watch thee on from steep to steep,
> Timidly lighted by thy vestal torch,
> Till in some Latmian cave I see thee creep,
> To catch the young Endymion asleep,—
> Leaving thy splendour at the jagged porch,
> [20–24]

is a recollection of *Endymion.*[1] As we should expect there is a certain affinity between Hood's *Ode to Melancholy* and Keats's stanzas on the same argument; nevertheless in spite of the *tone* common to both poets, it may be noticed that Keats's sadness arises from excess of happiness, while Hood's feeling has its source in the fact that the aspirations of the soul are weighed down by the base tendencies of matter [ll. 109–122]. Besides Milton's influence is felt in the rural setting, in the contemplative attitude of mind, which remind us of *Il Penseroso* [21–34]; yet, there is the unique charm of Keats's art in 33–34:

> Whilst man is made of his own grave,
> And fairest clouds but gilded rain,

and in 92–98:

> Now let us with a spell invoke
> The full-orb'd moon to grieve our eyes;
> Not bright, not bright, but, with a cloud
> Lapp'd all about her, as if from rest
> The ghost of the late buried sun
> Had crept into the skies.

In the ode *Autumn,* and especially in the last strophe, we remark the deadly languor, the exceeding sweetness as of a fruit overripe, the love of beauty deep to sadness, the same *stimmung* of Keats's homonymous poem; the same flowing music accompanies the melancholy *rêverie.* Keats's lines, anyhow, seem to have been inspired by the drowsy spell of a September sunset, Hood's by a sullen, dark October morning:

> She wears a coronal of flowers faded
> Upon her forehead, and a face of care;—
> There is enough of wither'd everywhere
> To make her bower,—and enough of gloom;
> There is enough of sadness to invite,
> If only for the rose that died,—whose doom
> Is Beauty's,—she that with the living bloom
> Of conscious cheeks most beautifies the light.
> [50–57]

Moreover we notice Keats's technique in

> Shaking his languid locks all dewy bright
> With tangled gossamer that fell by night,
> Pearling his coronet of golden corn,
> [6–8]

and in the passages

> Where are the songs of Summer? . . .
> Where are the blooms of Summer?—In the west
> Blushing their last to the last sunny hours, . . .[2]

The nostalgic passion of *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy* pervades *The Water Lady;* here, as in Keats's ballad, an unearthly being, weird and beautiful, casts a shadow for ever on a pining soul; here we find the strange glamour of the fairy song, and in the fine close a higher symbolism than in Keats's poem.

> I know my life will fade away,
> I know that I must vainly pine,
> For I am made of mortal clay,
> But she's divine.

[1] *The Complete Poetical Works* of THOMAS HOOD, ed. by Walter Jerrold. Oxford University Press, 1911, p. 187.—For Endymion, see also *Ode to Melancholy,* 99–107:

> The moon, she is the source of sighs . . .
> The same fair light that shone in streams,
> The fairy lamp that charm'd the lad.

[2] Cf. Keats's *To Autumn* [*Complete Works,* ed. by H. Buxton Forman. Glasgow. Gowans and Gray, 1901, vol. II, 119]:

> Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
> Think not of them, . . .
> While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day, . . .

Although the mystic charm is largely spoilt by diffuseness, there is in the sonnet *To Fancy*[3] the sense of natural magic and the love of romance which in Keats are seen at their best in the often quoted lines of the *Ode to a Nightingale:*

> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Both the sonnet of Hood and Keats's passage spring from a common liking—from a liking for the delicate and aerial in imagination and from a tendency to the romantic and legendary:

> Most delicate Ariel! . . .
> Won by the mind's high magic to its hest,—
> . . . to bring
> Illuminate visions to the eye of rest,
> Or rich romances from the florid West,—
> Or to the sea, for mystic whispering, . . .

Elsewhere Keats's influence is blended with recollections of the Elizabethans; yet, notwithstanding the Shakespearian character, the solemn, stately splendour of the initial image, in the sonnet at p. 192,

> How bravely Autumn paints upon the sky
> The gorgeous fame of summer which is fled!

we observe Keats's peculiar treatment of the poetical thought in the subtle metaphor:

> Hues of all flow'rs that in their ashes lie,
> Trophied in that fair light whereon they fed,
> Tulip, and hyacinth, and sweet rose red . . .
> Look here how honour glorifies the dead,
> And warms their scutcheons with a glance of gold,

and we are reminded of the poet of *Endymion* in the gem-like, glowing atmosphere of the whole piece.

The plot of Hood's dramatic romance *Lamia* is founded on Keats's Poem; beside the dialogue being very poor, Hood's drama suffers from the absence of the unearthly pathos which quickens Keats's decorative figures; in the catastrophe, different from the original, Hood failed in his attempt to intensify the tragic power of the uncanny story; the new characters introduced by Hood are trivial and carelessly sketched. Another reference to *Lamia* is made in *Lycus, the Centaur,* the poem dedicated to Keats's friend, John Hamilton Reynolds:

> And the snake, not with magical orbs to devise
> Strange death, but with woman's attraction of eyes.[4]

A prominent feature of this composition is the haunting terror of the men turned into horrid shapes by Circe's enchantments [23–36; 46–48]. We have here an interplay of influences, Milton's *Comus* and Keats's *Endymion* [III Book, 234–711] being present to Hood's mind while writing this poem.[5] *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* has been written under the same strain of inspiration which gave birth to *Endymion* and *Lamia,* an inspiration rejoicing in what is fantastic and lustrous, in the rainbow-coloured world of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream,* and Drayton's *Nymphidia.* The description of the fairies flocking around Titania has a delicate charm of its own; but Keats's influence is still perceptible in the use of such epithets as *rushy, ruddy,* in

> . . . from the dewy meads, and rushy leas, . . .
> The ruddy skin from a sweet rose's cheek.[6]

and in the exquisite similitude:

> . . . others from tall trees
> Dropp'd, like shed blossoms, silent to the grass,
> Spirits and elfin small, . . .

[3] *Poet. Works,* ed. cit., p. 193.

[4] Cf. *Lamia,* I, 59–62:

> Her head was a serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
> She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
> And for eyes: what could such eyes do there
> But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?

[5] See the mention of Scylla at ll. 210–211:

> . . . and they told me the tale
> Of Scylla, . . .

Cf. *End.* III, 780–784 and *passim.*

[6] Ed. cit., p. 112, St. VII, VIII, IX.—As regards epithets see

> Nor speckled thrushes flutter far apart;
> [CXXII]

and *End.* I, 485:

> To hear the speckled thrushes, . . .

Cf. also XXXVI: "The pastoral cowslips" and *Ode to a Nightingale,* V, 6: "the pastoral eglantine."

There is sometimes a soft glow in his landscapes, the same golden, subdued light we find in Keats's pictures, and sometimes that sumptuous brilliancy of fiery hues, which the poet of *Hyperion* took from Spenser's palette.

'Twas in that mellow season of the year,
When the hot Sun singes the yellow leaves
Till they be gold, . . . [I, 1–3]

And there were crystal pools, peopled with fish
Argent and gold; and some of tyrian skin,
Some crimson-barr'd; . . .
And there were many birds of many dyes, . . .
And stately peacocks with their splendid eyes,
And gorgeous pheasants with their golden glow,
Like Iris just bedabbled in her bow, . . .[7]
[IV, V]

Like Keats, Hood is fond of painting with gorgeous tints the details of his backgrounds,—an iridescent refulgence being the result of this accumulation of minute, bright particulars.

'Tis like the birthday of the world,
When earth was born in bloom;
The light is made of many dyes,
The air is all perfume;
There's crimson buds, and white and blue—
The very rainbow showers
Have turned to blossoms where they fell,
And sown the earth with flow'rs.

There's fary tulips in the East,
The garden of the Sun, . . .
While morn opes like a crimson rose,
Still wet with pearly showers.[8]

[7] Cf. Keats:

There the king-fisher saw his plumage bright
Vieing with fish of brilliant dye below;
Whose silken fins, and golden scales' light
Cast upward, through the waves, a ruby glow.
Poet. Works, I, 26.

The fairies' sumptuous garments also betray Spenser's influence;

Then came an elf, right beauteous to behold,
Whose coat was like a brooklet that the sun
Hath all embroider'd with its crooked gold,
It was so quaintly wrought, and overrun,
With spangled traceries . . .
And as he stept out of the shadows dun,
His jewels sparkled in the pale moon's gleams;
[LIX]

the subtle simile, however, could only have been suggested by Keats's closer observation of nature.

[8] *Song* [*Poet. Works,* p. 404].

A picture exhibiting a subtle and strange pathos, such as occurs in Keats's *Endymion,* is to be seen in *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies,* st. xxxvii:

The widow'd primrose weeping to the moon,
And saffron crocus in whose chalice bright
A cool libation hoarded for the noon
Is kept—and she that purifies the light,
The virgin lily, faithful to her white, . . .[9]

and in the same poem one remarks a reflection of Endymion's wanderings in the underworld [Book II], of the "faint eventide of gems" and melodious symphony of far waterfalls, in the passage describing the subterranean rivers.[10] A similar image we meet in the sonnet that Hood wrote in a copy of *Endymion,*

I saw pale Dian, sitting by the brink
Of silver falls, the overflow of fountains. . . .

while he was lamenting the death of the young poet,

And as I mused, in dull imaginings,
There came a flash of garments, and I knew
The awful Muse by her harmonious wings.
Charming the air to music as she flew—
Anon there rose an echo through the vale
Gave back Endymion in a dream-like tale.

FEDERICO OLIVERO.

Torino.

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[9] Cf. *End.,* IV, 910, 698:
Wan as primroses gather'd at midnight . . .
And honeysuckles full of clear bee-wine. . . .
To Fancy, 51–2:
Shaded hyacinth, alway
Sapphire queen of the mid-May;

[10] . . . bubbling springs and fountains, that below
Course thro' the veiny earth,—which when they freeze
Into hard chrysolites, we bid to flow.
Creeping like subtle snakes, when, as they go,
We guide their winding to melodious falls, . . .
[LX.]